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Housekeepers' Chat

Tuesday, February 4, 1930.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Subject: "The Common Cold." Program based on talk prepared by Dr. Allen K. Krause of Tucson, Arizona, for the Bureau of the Public Health Service, U. S. Treasury Department.

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This morning I am going to talk about the common cold. Perhaps, if you listen carefully, you will find ways to keep this disease from reaching your children. My information comes from Dr. Allen K. Krause, of Tucson, Arizona. Let's make this a question-and-answer chat, for that is a good way to get very definite information.

First: "What disease is the most common cause of illness?" The common cold. It also accounts for far more days lost from work and from school than does any other disease.

Second: "What is the cause of the common cold?" Nobody knows. It will probably surprise many of you to learn that the cause of the common cold, that is, its specific creative agent, remains unknown.

Third: "Do you mean that nothing is known about what causes the common cold?" Two facts are pretty well established: that the condition is caused by a living parasitic agent, and that it is contagious, that is, transmissible from person to person.

Fourth: "How can we limit the spread of colds?" Every intelligent person knows, only too well, and from experience, the first symptoms of this malady. If, with the appearance of these first symptoms, every prospective sufferer refrained for a few days from his daily round in office, shop, or factory, he would reduce the area sown with the seeds of the common cold by as many people as ordinarily come within his range of contact. And, by remaining indoors, at home, he would be doing the one thing most likely to lessen the duration and severity of his own ailment.

"Isn't it too much to expect all men and women to stay home, at the first symptoms of a common cold?" Perhaps. However, they can cover sneezing and coughing noses and mouths.

"What is the first rule in the prevention of the common cold?" Let the patient keep to himself. If this rule were strictly and universally observed, it alone would cut down colds to a minimum.

"How is the common cold passed on from one person to another?" If the common cold is infectious and contagious, it can be contracted from hand

to hand, and from mouth to mouth. We who have colds can help in prevention by not shaking hands, and by developing a conscience about sitting down to meals with cleansed hands, and about carrying the unwashed hands too frequently to the mouth.

"Is there any natural immunity to the common cold?" Judging from experience and observation, there is little natural immunity to the common cold. Most all of us are susceptible, the strong and vigorous, as well as the more puny and delicate.

"Is there any way to overcome susceptibility to catching cold?" Yes, by gradually increasing and judicious exposure to low temperatures and inclement weather outdoors. This hardening should begin in the late summer, and consist of regular exercise--walking is good--in weather of every kind, and be continued through the fall and winter.

"Do wet shoes and stockings, allowed to dry on the feet, cause one to 'take cold'?" Ordinarily, wet shoes and stockings, allowed to dry on the feet, in the case of a person not used to such conditions, and not exercising vigorously, creates the risk of "catching cold." But this risk becomes slight in the case of the person who is used to "wet feet," or who, through physical activity, keeps up a vigorous circulation of blood through that part of the body which would otherwise be chilled by the drying of the garment on it.

"What connection do the clothes we wear, and the temperature of our homes, have with the common cold?" The average man, woman, and child should guard against colds by avoiding over-heavy or over-warm clothing, and over-heated houses or work-rooms, in winter.

"What is the proper temperature for our homes?" Not more than 70 degrees. It is very important that we accustom ourselves to temperatures of not more than 70 degrees, when at bodily rest indoors. It is at about this level of the thermometer that the healthy body functions best.

Remember, that a broad principle in the prevention of colds aims at doing away with coddling or over-protecting the body against them. A hot-house existence is the surest path to the common cold.

"Why are some people unusually susceptible to colds?" An unusual susceptibility to colds is frequently due to defects or abnormalities of the upper air-passages, and disappears when these defects are removed or corrected. The person who has more than his share of colds should always undergo a special examination of the nose and throat, with this possibility in mind, and have all possible sources of trouble eradicated.

"Is there any connection between the common cold and acute bronchitis, and other diseases of the lungs?" Yes indeed. The common cold is the fore-runner and direct breeder of many, perhaps most, cases of acute bronchitis and broncho-pneumonia, and the "activator" or awakener of numerous cases of pulmonary tuberculosis.

The larger part of the more unfortunate diseases which follow the common cold, and will recur to plague mankind, would be prevented if only the average man and woman would come to a proper appreciation of the common cold and its ravages, and would treat it with the respect that it deserves--regard it more seriously than is commonly done, nurse it apart and with slackened pace for a few days, and never neglect it as merely an inconvenience of no moment.

Once upon a time, the great physician, Osler, was asked for a prescription for a common cold. He reached for a blank and wrote down as follows: "R/. I give you four days."

No better general prescription for the abatement of the average cold than this--careful attention to it for a few days--has yet been discovered.

This concludes Doctor Krause's talk about what causes the common cold. I have learned a great deal from it--I hope that it has been beneficial to you.

The other day I visited a young mother whose baby had a bad "cold in the head." Thoughtlessly, she had allowed a neighbor, suffering from a cold, to fondle the baby. All colds are contagious, and babies must be kept away from any person who has a cold, whether child or grown-up.

What is "only a cold" in an adult, may be serious illness for a baby, and develop into bronchitis or pneumonia. Earache and "running ear" are commonly caused by colds. If a baby has colds often, the adenoids are probably enlarged or infected, and should be removed by a skillful doctor.

But here I am, talking about babies, when this lecture has been reserved until tomorrow.

Wednesday: "Every Mother Needs a Sense of Humor."

